1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



755 To a certain extent the employment of lamas or Mun to drive away devils depends on the wishes and wealth of the sufferer or his near relatives; as with us some people are hypochondriac, some people refuse to take even necessary precautions when they are badly ill and some say and feel that they cannot afford the time or money. Some illnesses everybody can diagnose and tell which is the causing demon and what is the necessary curative ceremony, just as many people can recognise and know the treatment of the commoner illnesses. Others are more obscure and consultation has to be made. For the lama there are two possible forms of consultation; he can divine with his rosary, as has already been described, or he can consult the astrological books employed in horoscopes which will tell infallibly what devil on that day would be troubling the person born on the date of the sufferer's birth. In nearly every case a Mun and a lama are consulted simultaneously; should their diagnoses differ a third opinion will be sought and even a fourth and fifth until the Mun and the lama are in agreement as to the cause of the illness and therefore as to its cure. The Mun divines partly by his rosary and partly by *mumthen*-ing, that is, communicating with his or her possessing spirit. Very often before consultation with a Mun consultation will be made with a layman who possesses a rosary and knows how to use it to discover which Mun—or rather the Mun born in which year—will be most suitable to deal with this particular patient.

[771] The fear of illness and the ceremonies against it form by far the largest impact of religion on the life of the average Lepcha; a lama is far more a doctor than he is a priest in his function. Medicine in our sense of the word plays no rôle in the lama's cures; the patient is given no drugs of any sort to take; the cause of all illnesses and misfortunes is considered to be supernatural and therefore only supernatural methods are suitable for dealing with them. The Lepchas' knowledge of drugs is anyhow very slight but those who do know medicinal herbs can employ them without any form of ceremony. Religious consultation is very seldom held in the case of the illness of infants or young children; if a child is badly ill the most usual form of cure is to try a change of air, to take the child on a visit to the house of some relative—usually a relative by marriage, either the wife's parents or the wife's brothers. Children until they achieve complete physical independence are barely considered as fully human; they are not given any burial ceremony nor are they the subject of other ceremonies. Children

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than they really are; they would be frightened of spoiling or losing them, though girls might try on the clothes and jewels of a friend for a moment just to see how they look. The only occasion on which clothes are borrowed is in the case of emergencies, for example if a person gets very wet far from his own home. Sometimes, it is said, a girl will dress up in men's clothes as a joke, but it would be considered rather shameful for a grown man to dress up as a woman, though young boys occasionally do so in play. One or two lamas told me that men were essentially superior to women, but I never heard similar opinions from a layman. Various details suggest that there is a sentiment of sex-rivalry, but it only seems to be openly formulated through contact with Nepali or Tibetans. In specifically Lepcha contexts this rivalry is unformulated and unstressed.

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viii

The ideal life of a Lepcha could be schematically represented by a slightly undulating curve, at first rising steeply, and then gradually flattening out, but still rising somewhat till the very end, when there is a tendency to drop again. The first years of life are a period of relative obscurity; a young child consumes more than he gives, and is therefore a weight on his parents and the community. Children are not on the whole harshly treated, but once they have achieved physical independence very little attention is paid to them. Grown-ups do not talk to or play with children; except when they are by themselves children are in the background to do simple chores and to be taught to equip themselves for adult life; they are a responsibility, not companions. There are no organised games for children, and no instruments which are intended to be children's toys; nor for that matter are there any games for adults. A few Lepchas know of the Nepali game of 'Cows and Tigers' (an elaborate form of the game of which the European 'Fox and Geese' is another representative) but they do not play it and do not understand why other people should do so.

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After about the age of ten a boy takes an increasing share in the productive work of the community and, as he grows up, is co-opted more and more into the communal life. There is no abrupt transition for the male between childhood and manhood; a youth takes on additional responsibility and work, and mingles more in the pastimes and discussions of his elders, according to his ability and private inclinations. Sexual experiment and adventure, marriage

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Lepcha babies are in fact extremely quiet and I practically never heard one cry; often during the day-long ceremonies there would be five or six children under three present, and one would really not be conscious of their presence. Even when children can move about they are remarkably quiet; and the complete absence of fidgeting is one of the most noticeable characteristics of Lepcha children. 854

The mental reactions of Lepcha babies seemed to me very slow. Often a baby under a year old would catch hold of my finger; after about half a minute it would recognise that I was a stranger and start whimpering; but quite a little more time would pass before it would let go of me. Babies have far more confidence when they are tied on to the back of an elder person than when they are held on the lap or are on the ground. I frequently dressed small wounds and washed the eyes of babies fastened on a back without their showing the slightest fear or making any noise, whereas when they were held in the arms or seated in the lap they were much more nervous; indeed when parents brought up their babies for medical attention I found it was much easier to treat them if the babies were first put on their backs.

It is practically only after nightfall and on the rare occasions when its guardian has work to do inside the house that babies are laid on the ground. Unless its guardian can keep a constant eye on it babies under the age of three are all the time strapped on somebody's back, irrespective of the work the guardian may be doing; neither grown-ups nor elder children appear to be impeded by the burden of a baby. Lepcha babies spend a great deal of their time in the first three years of their life learning to abandon themselves completely passively to the movements of their active carriers. It is a common sight to see a woman pounding rice—a very violent exercise which necessitates alternately straining the body and raising the arms and then bending sharply almost double—with her baby strapped on her back and possibly sleeping; the baby's head lolls in every direction with each movement.

Youngest or only children are usually carried much longer than other babies and consequently have an even longer training in complete passivity. In a mixed gathering I always found it easy to spot youngest or only children, partly by their timidity and their fear of leaving their elders, and partly by their insistent demands for attention and the bad-tempered crying in which they indulged if this attention was not given—types of behaviour ordinary 855

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



855 Lepcha children do not manifest. The extra timidity and lack of self-reliance seems to persist amongst such children until they are themselves parents. Amongst adults I did not notice any consistent type of behaviour which would indicate an only child, but the youngest, if there were elder siblings living, seemed to carry a great deal of their attitude of reliance on their parents over to their elder siblings until relatively late in life. The Lepchas agree that a youngest child is generally the best loved and most spoilt and given the best food, but they did not consider that there was any consistent difference in character between the youngest and other children; some might be cleverer than their elders, others duller.

854 Babies are very little talked to, and when they are it is usually in baby language. They are patted and kissed quite a lot. Kissing—the pressing of the lips on to another's cheek—is exclusively a pattern of behaviour between adults and young children. It forms no part of adult sexual behaviour. Adults who have been in the relationship of parent and child click their tongues at one another when they meet after a prolonged absence. Occasionally a woman will play with a baby's lips and tongue with her own tongue—a pastime both parties appear to enjoy; but by far the most common stimulation of children is patting their bottoms while they are being carried on a person's back; both men and women do this almost automatically when they are walking about or standing talking while carrying a baby; the patting is gentle and rhythmic.

Until a child is fairly well developed its parents do not encourage it to acquire physical independence and body techniques, chiefly I think on account of the long distances people have to go to reach their fields; a toddling and stumbling baby is far more of a handicap than a carried one. Elder siblings are more likely to encourage a baby in walking and balance, as the baby is a far greater burden and drawback to a child of six or seven than to an adult. The Lepchas consider that the backwardness of only children is due to the fact that they have no elder siblings to encourage and teach them.

While a baby is still at the breast its chief diet is pounded grain cooked in water or milk. When they have all their teeth they are given little pieces of meat, but only as titbits and not as the main part of the meal. They are given fruits as they ripen. After about [252] the age of two they are given popped corn and cooked grain to nibble while they are hungry, and from about that age they start getting a sip of *chi*.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



draws its knife in anger, if it tells lies or quarrels, it will be given a really severe thrashing, or otherwise hurt or frightened. The punishments are often proportionately more severe than they would be for a similar crime performed by an adult in order to act as a deterrent; badness is an inbred characteristic—the child is born 'with a bad heart'—and unless this badness is eradicated by education, especially from the parents, the child will become a socially undesirable adult. It is exceptional for children to be so drastically punished, and the great majority grow up without having any experience of such treatment.

At the same time as its moral education a child's technical education starts. Children are taught work techniques by being instructed to copy their elders, by verbal admonition, or by having their arms held while they are put through the appropriate gestures. Boys are especially taught agricultural work and mat weaving, girls spinning, the pounding and winnowing of grain and cooking. On occasion boys prefer to spin and do their mothers' work, and girls to copy their fathers; little attention is paid to this; as the children grow older they learn to do their proper work. There are no 'occupational inverts' in Lingthem.

From about the age of six children should be able to assist and accompany their elders in all forms of work. Boys are thought to be a little slower in learning than girls. A six-year-old girl should be an active help to her mother; boys at that age are still learning and aren't a real help to their fathers till a year or so later. When a child has acquired complete physical independence any signs of precociousness or adaptability which will make it more quickly a useful member of the household are looked for and encouraged. There are a number of household chores—particularly the fetching of water and firewood—which are considered specifically children's work; adults who have to do such jobs for themselves feel that they are slightly ill-used; it will be remembered that one of the reasons for childless people adopting a boy was to get somebody to do such work.[7] Children also do light work in the fields; a child can collect twigs and drop seeds as well as an adult.

As soon as children can talk properly adults stop using baby language to them; indeed young children are talked to very little, for it is not considered that they will be able to talk reasonably until they have lost their milk-teeth. At about the age of five children —especially the children of lamas—are taught and encouraged to

[7] See Chapter Six, p. 178.

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reared by strangers, but this is seldom successful. This course was tried with a boy from Lungdeum and also with Katel's eldest son; but both boys ran away and wandered all over the place, Katel's son finally dying young in foreign parts. The only person in Lingthem who was really *tané*—a quarreller and a thief—was Sangkyar, who is a cretinous defective.

V

When a child stops being a baby and becomes a young Lepcha the world becomes a more difficult place for him. Instead of being treated with a rather impersonal kindness, he is now treated with a rather impersonal neglect. He has the compensation of adult equipment—the knife and haversack which are the outward sign of physical independence—but he is also judged by adult standards; he is capable of committing adult crimes, and has to show that he possesses the adult virtues. By negative standards the children form a group; the younger ones leave the baby group to become trained to be adults; the elder ones are by their increased knowledge and initiative more and more accepted into the group of full-grown adults, as they become more self-supporting—it is considered that at the age of twelve boys and girls should be capable of doing the full work of a man or woman—and marriage arrangements are made for them. The children are not in opposition to the adults; they are not as a group ill-treated, though possibly individuals may be, except for the occasional blows they may get if they are a nuisance; they are provided with plenty of food as before; and, except for only children, or children of the very poorest parents, they have an animal or so and a little piece of ground as their private property.[8] Full adult status is a goal they have to work towards; they see this goal and the greater number of children are very anxious to grow up. This is particularly true of the boys, who have to wait longer before they can be considered fully adult; the girls attain psychological maturity much earlier, for by the age of twelve they are considered to be at their most beautiful and are usually *asék*'d; and even earlier they may become sexually conscious and realise that because of their sex they have a quality which makes them important and desirable to adults. It is only temperamentally or socially maladjusted children who appear to be oppressed by the neglect and occasional harsh treatment which is part of their

[8] See Chapter Three, p. 108.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



education, and who do not see the desirable goal of full status approaching constantly nearer.

Very often shortly after their emancipation—that is round about the age of five or six—children go through a stage of excessive bashfulness and timidity. Adult Lepchas think this silly and rather funny, and, with their habitual insensitiveness to differences of character, are liable to tease such shy children—to imitate them or make remarks about them in front of their faces. This bashfulness passes off gradually; boys generally get rid of it earlier; with girls it may last till marriage.

Between about the ages of five and twelve little girls spend much more time with their parents than little boys. Both boys and girls are with their elders nearly all the time that there is work to be done in the fields, but in the evenings and on holidays the boys are usually freer; the girls are wanted to help their mothers with the cooking and especially to mind and hold the younger siblings. The boys, especially if they have no sisters, may be wanted for the same work, but most of them have more liberty. A few of the girls —the tomboys—like to get away to play with the other children, but adults try to discourage this as a reputation for neglecting her work to go and play would tell against the girl's chances of marriage. The same holds good, but within somewhat wider limits, for boys; a boy who spent too much time amusing himself instead of working for the household would get a reputation for laziness, which would make him an undesirable groom.

The choice of companionship for playmates is usually extremely limited; companionship is chiefly based on approximately equal age, though, if there is a choice, relations or near neighbours are usually preferred. Boys usually work and play in groups of two or three; but these groups do not appear to be constant and depend more than anything on the children being at leisure, or engaged in the same work, simultaneously.

Lepcha children have no toys, nor is there any sort of organised game. To a great extent children play by themselves; in the house they will make piles of corn cobs or amuse themselves by arranging grains in patterns (a characteristic trait of Lepcha children is a great feeling for tidiness and neatness, and a predilection for straight lines; anything which can be folded straight or arranged in lines is so done with remarkable trueness; curves do not come into childish patterns, nor, for that matter into adult construction or weaving); out of doors they will play catch with suitable flowers

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



the child. Throughout Nepal used railway tickets are nowadays much used for the same purpose; but this particular charm does not appear yet to have reached Sikkim.

Amongst Lepchas, Limboos, and Sherpas, as well as Tibetans, strings of snail-shells are worn on the necks and wrists of children, and are sometimes fastened to their clothes. These are places for the soul to hide in, should the child be attacked by an evil spirit. They are often worn up to the age of seven or eight, after which the soul is considered capable of looking after itself.

The following natural objects are considered to have magical qualities, and for this reason are often made up into charms. The use of some of them probably originated in Nepal; but, like most of the other charms and amulets from that country, they are highly prized by Lepchas.

Black cats' placenta; tigers' whiskers, preferably obtained while the animal is not quite dead; tigers' claws and collar-bones; armadillo scales; the horn or hoof of rhinoceros; the milk of a tigress; the placenta of elephants and rhinoceros; bears' claws; wolves' tongues; musk; bears' gall-bladders; and finally, various plants and herbs, particularly if they have been blessed and consecrated at auspicious moments by strolling Lamas.

These things are worn mostly by women and children, and are thought to ward off the evil eye and the effects of sorcery. They are particularly efficacious in guarding against the evil desires of envious neighbours; but are also considered effective in counteracting any possible harm which might result from a stranger looking on at the time of eating.

The products of the rhinoceros are, of course, in great demand all over India. They are believed by Hindus, for instance, to have a purifying effect, and make offerings of water acceptable to the spirits of ancestors. Their use is restricted to the higher castes, and only those who take no alcohol may use them. Hindus of lower caste may make use of rhinoceros horn in their worship; but in this case are

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



but consists of a piece of cloth about sixteen feet in length, 291
fringed at both ends. This is folded in two, wrapped round
the body with the fringe at the top and fastened over the
left shoulder with a bamboo pin: the right shoulder is left
bare. A cord of some sort is worn round the waist; but
before this is fastened the cloth is first pulled up so as to
form a pouch, in which all sorts of odds and ends are carried:
this serves the purpose of a pocket. If the man is a Lama [773]
he will wear his yellow sash as a belt; otherwise the *dum-dyum*
is drawn in at the waist by means of a cord of some similar
woven material. Hats are not often worn; but some people
wear either a battered European Homburg (almost the
commonest form of headgear in present-day Tibet), or the
small maroon Tibetan hat (imported from China), topped
with a coral button. Boys usually wear only the *dum-dyum*,
with nothing beneath, a form of costume which leaves little to [855]
the imagination.

Women wear a one-piece cotton shift with a blouse of
brightly coloured silk on top. Over this is worn a sleeveless
one-piece garment reaching to the ankles. It is usually made
of black or some dark-coloured velveteen, and fastened at the
waist with a silken sash in the same way as the men's garment,
so as to form a pouch or pocket. Women are always bare-
headed; and neither sex wears any form of footgear.

I suppose clothes are occasionally washed, but this is not 515
apparent. What is quite certain, however, is that the people
themselves never wash and are indescribably filthy. "Though
fond of bathing when they come to a stream in hot weather,"
notes Hooker, "and expert, even admirable swimmers, these
people never take to the water for the purpose of ablution."
It is said that people in mourning can always be recognised,
for, to quote the Mandal's words, "Until the death cere- [765]
monies are completed the relatives wear only their oldest
clothes, and do not trouble to wash their hair": but it would
take a Lepcha to recognise the difference!

Round most houses there is usually a small garden, in 351
which such things as peas, chillies and other vegetables and 244

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5



842 born to be a girl, as in this case she can look after subsequent children and relieve her mother. Apart from this, there seems a slight preference for boys; for, in addition to the help they are able to give in the fields, it means that there is someone to look after the parents when they are too old to work for
591 themselves, whereas girls leave home on marriage, except in very rare circumstances.

855 Once a child is big enough to look after itself—that is when
854 it reaches the age of four or five—it is left more or less to its
857 own devices; and unless a boy is to become a Lama he
871 receives no formal training such as is given to the ordinary European child. Nor is a girl taught how to cook, but by watching her mother and doing odd jobs about the house she gradually acquires the necessary skill. Little girls are fond of playing at making toy houses and it is a common sight to see them pretending to cook with leaves and mud,
524 but I never saw a girl playing with a doll and was told that they are unknown.

Small boys seem to spend most of their time wandering about with a pellet-bow; and stilt-walking is a popular
534 amusement. Most boys also play the flute, which is merely a length of thin bamboo with five holes for stops.

593 Most people are of the opinion that the ideal family consists of from three to four girls and from four to five boys. If there are too many boys there will not, unless the family is very rich, be enough to feed them all when they grow up and marry. As a matter of fact, the average family in Lingtem is extremely small, and a number of couples are childless. Since the average number of children does not give an indication of the true state of affairs, I have given the composition of each of the families in Talung in Appendix I,
593 to which the reader is referred.[1] It will be noted that a very
842 high proportion of the women appear to be sterile, a matter which causes great concern to the people themselves, who realise that their numbers are steadily dwindling, and who desire children above all things. This question of sterility is perhaps the greatest problem with which the Lepchas

[1] [See cat. 116, p. 301 -- Analysis]

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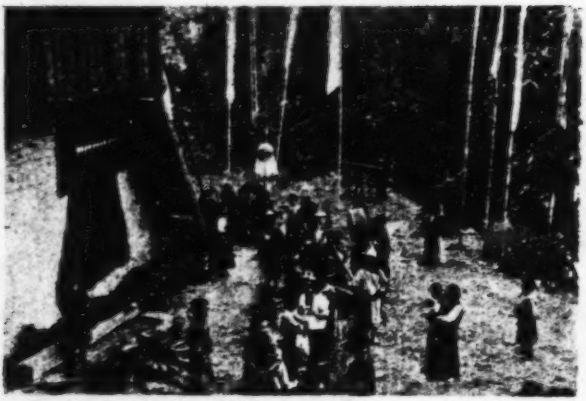

The *Boom Kor* ceremony. The procession about to leave Lingtem monastery.

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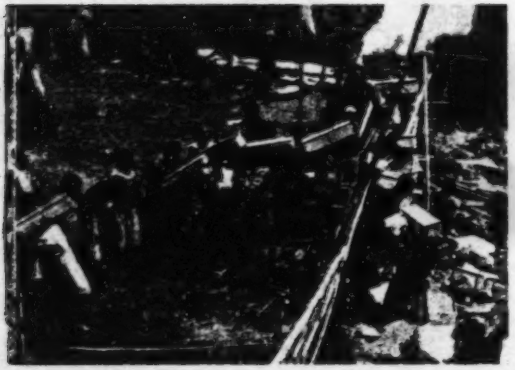

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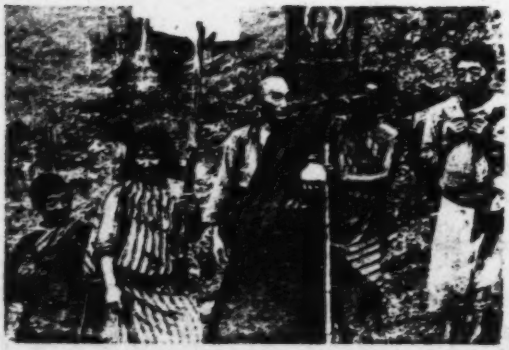
The sacred books starting off on their journey round the district. Each volume is carried by a woman.



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Small image of Guru Rimpoche, over which a bell-shaped "umbrella" is held, and pot of holy water being carried in the procession.

[Facing p. 290]